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## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MUSIC

In his book on *Heroes and Hero-Worship* Carlyle left the musician without exposition. He makes amongst others the following statement: "Music is well said to be the speech of angels; in fact, nothing among the utterances allowed to man is felt to be so divine. It brings us nearer to the Infinite; we look for moments, across the cloudy elements, into the Eternal Sea of Light, when song leads and inspires us. Serious nations, all nations that can still listen to the mandate of nature, have prized song and music as the highest; as a vehicle for worship, for prophecy, and for whatsoever in them was divine. Their singer was a Vates, admitted to the council of the universe, friend of the gods, and choicest benefactor to man." Notwithstanding this tribute, which accords to music the position to which its adherents believe that it has an eminent right, Carlyle does not give the great musician a place among the heroes who have labored with success in the advancement of the race.

So Emerson, in his "Representative Men," speaks of the poet and the mystic, the philosopher, the man of the world, and the writer, but he proceeds in his discussion in apparent unconsciousness of the claim of the illustrious musician to a share in his eulogies of the benefactors of mankind. On the other hand, however, in George Eliot's novel of *Daniel Deronda* there appears a pianist and composer, Klesmer, who makes extraordinary demands for due consideration. This figure is generally regarded as being a portrayal of Anton Rubenstein; and he arrogates to himself an assured position among the great men of his period who mould public opinion and give form and character to the age to which they belong.

It has taken music a long time to come into its own. It is the last of the great arts to reach its majority and accomplish its task. For sculpture we go back to the Greeks; for architecture we have Egypt and Athens and the cathedral building centuries; for painting we have the times of Raphael and Angelo, Dürer and Rembrandt; poetry, the universal art, belongs everywhere; but music has had a long novitiate, has made a slow and arduous

advance through the ages, and has apparently reached its fruition in our own time. It seems strange that it should be so, for dealing as it does with man's emotional nature, so intimate to his very being, one would suppose that it should have been the first in the series.

In one sense it has been the first in the series. In response to the varied experiences of the race, simple and characteristic melodies have sprung up everywhere, folk songs, folk rhythms, folk dances. These are as changeable as the skies that called them forth, and they accompany the march of human life with a persistent comment and expression. Love and hate, patriotism and religion and superstition, find in them revelation and criticism. They make a precious storehouse of material for the musician, just as the racial myths have done for the poet, but the development of the distinctive master in the art has been a work of far more difficulty, and when he came, he was at first willing to take a somewhat subordinate position. He was willing to put his achievement at the service of the poet or the dramatist or the priest; he was willing to exercise his art in submission to the noble ritual of the church, or as an accompaniment to the progress of events on the stage, or give a further refinement to the ode or lyric of his brother, who rather looked down upon him as the lesser personage in the partnership. Finally it dawned upon him that his art was as worthy of cultivation in itself as any of the others, that it might celebrate its independence from these, and in fact that it was capable of a realization to which the poet and the sculptor, the painter and the architect, should bring their contribution. Music has thus, wherever it has appeared, had three stages of development: first, its naïve realization in folk song and instrument; next, the elaboration of its resources in subordination to alien expression; and lastly, its emergence as an independent art, and indeed a new synthesis to which voice and poetry and the rest should give loyal allegiance.

This last success was in a measure brought about by the enlargement and improvement of the orchestra. The symphony gave the composer a form of independent music into which he could pour his deepest thoughts, his intensest feelings. The musical art, like the other arts, claimed for itself the prerogative

of representing life in all its phases and complexities, and a recognition of its great masters equal to that given the master in the other fields of artistic accomplishment. When the next book on heroes and grand men is written, Beethoven will there most assuredly have a place.

If we follow the progress of music, we shall find an increasing apprehension of its capabilities for the expression of the deepest motives, and a growing revelation of its importance in the uplift of man. Wherever music has found genuine lodgment, it took its place at once as an instrument of moral elevation and spiritual insight. Plato has recognized its extraordinary efficiency and connects musical changes with transformations of the commonwealth. He says: "Music is a moral law. It gives a soul to the universe, gaiety and life to everything. It is the essence of order, and leads to all that is good, just, and beautiful, of which it is the invisible but nevertheless dazzling, passionate and eternal form." The Pythagoreans developed their theory of the music of the spheres, and made instruction in music correlative with the emancipation of the will. Religion everywhere has used music as one of her chief handmaidens and interpreters. Where the voice and exposition of the preacher have failed to bring conviction, the hymn and the sacred chorus have shattered the barriers and entered the sacred places of the heart with messages of healing and purification. The great musicians have been master instructors, and education has never assumed a more persuasive form than as music.

The great musicians have stood side by side with the benefactors who have achieved most for the advancing rectitude. Palestrina expressed in his motets and in his masses the heights and depths of the Catholic vision, and Dante has no spiritual joys which Palestrina is unable to sing in his luminous medium. John Sebastian Bach needs to fear no comparison with any poet of any time; for fecundity of ideas, for sincerity of purpose, for resolute determination to the highest, he belongs with Luther, who knew how close of kin were song and worship. At the time of Germany's most remarkable outburst in literature and art and philosophy, when Kant delivered his epoch-making lectures, and his great disciple, Hegel, bettered his instruction, when Schiller

and Goethe spoke as the modern man speaks at his noblest, Beethoven was no less an expresser of the eternal verities than any one of these. The Fifth Symphony with its knock of fate at the door, with its andante of golden aspirations, its scherzo of hope and courage, and its final entrance into the realm of free realization, remains to-day a work of creative art such as the Parthenon must have been in all its glory, one of the few things finished in this hasty world, finished forever. The Ninth Symphony, another apocalyptic vision, has in it elements which are such as the deepest consciousness has ever endeavored to make clear to man for his liberation from the bondages of the material self. The later musicians have followed in the same paths: Wagner with his Tannhäuser, the salvation through the ministrations of institutional forces from the passions that emerge from the abyss; Strauss with his "Death and Transfiguration," a lyric assurance of immortality; Brahms with his great symphonies, a tonic acceptance of the earthly struggle, and a calm foreknowledge of victory. Music, since it has reached its maturity, has thus accompanied the passage of events with its commentaries and its solutions just as every great art has. Political transformations, æsthetic developments, social modifications, have found in music a coadjutor who knew well whither the advance was tending.

Music exceeds the other arts in that it compels the listener into a closer intimacy with its enchantments. The rapt hearer becomes the symphony which the orchestra pours into the air around it. The experience of the great man to whom have descended, as it were, from the empyrean the harmonies which the obedient instruments and voices send out at his command, are our experiences as we give ourselves to them, and we live through in a brief interval the illuminations, the triumphs, which are not those of a single individual, but which are those of universal man in the attainment of the best that can be. While poetry unquestionably has been above all the other arts the light-bringer and the healing physician, music has immersed us in the deepest movements of life. A hearing of true music is thus the passage from one typical elevation to another with a closeness, a certainty, a conviction, which can be only actuality itself. The region in which music dwells is the universal consciousness which

is freedom and wisdom and goodness conjoined in a unity for which no lesser appellation is possible than that of the celestial beauty.

Does music reach our will and our understanding, does it leave permanent results behind it, does it make for character and for righteousness, does it lead to nobility of conduct, which is three-fourths of our being, as Arnold said, whose voice rings in the ears of the generations forever? The questions are answered, if the foregoing statements are subjects of complete verification, and the history of music will assuredly furnish such verification. What Novalis said of philosophy can be predicated of music, it gives us God, Freedom, and Immortality. Poetry has made man nobler through the purification of his emotions of fear and pity; the coming to life of Hermione, the return to rightful possession of Prospero, the adjudication of the Pope in the "Ring and the Book," uplift us into regions where we find ourselves in our true home and dwelling. The "Magnificat" in Liszt's symphonic poem "Dante," Cèsar Franck's orchestral compositions, take us up into the same atmosphere of invigorant strength and activity.

In its lighter moods music has given to our vivacities an additional charm and halo. The comedy of England and France and Germany has had musical illustrations which do not pale when set beside their prosaic or rhythmical compeers. The "Meistersinger of Nürnberg" will stand the test when placed with the humor of Molière or Shakespeare. The entire production of Mozart—leaving the "Requiem" in its melancholy grandeur—is comedy in its best estate, the brilliant recognition of temporal incongruities placed in contrast with the truths of the world, and showing how those darkeners of counsel with all their terrors and swollen self-appreciations and make-believe torments vanish in the splendor of the skies. The world of music is not tragic, the ripple of humor speeds across the sea-mass of its harmonies with ever-changing flicker of sunlight or moonlight, the voices that ring throughout its distances of plain and mountain are those of rejoicings over the disappearing tribulations that assail us.

Is music only a kind of supreme pleasure to which we give such interpretation as we bring to it? Is Absolute Music, which

is unaccompanied by any verbal text or programme, only a series of sounding forms so arranged as to produce the noblest effects? In the development of the art the passage has been made from pure music to programme music with its names of movements and its texts, in which the most varied harmonic complexities have illustrated the most recondite themes ; the operas of Wagner, the symphonic poems of Strauss, and the works of Vincent d'Indy, show to what extent the musical idealization of such themes has gone ; but Mendelssohn refused to give names to his "Songs without Words" because they were, from his point of view, as clear as any lyrics ever written, and the youth, who, when under twenty, could write music for Titania and Oberon as the master spirit of the ages saw them, had a right to be heard in his maturity, which was one of learning and wisdom and service. Robert and Clara Schumann, who were in music a pair of wedded lovers like the Brownings in poetry, considered themselves as apostles of a dispensation which was to furnish peace and consolation to those who accepted it. Elizabeth Barret Browning in her religious devotion to her poetry did not go beyond Clara Schumann. The world of music like the world of poetry contains the noblest inspirations of the noblest souls at the height of their giving when the Mystery becomes Revelation and the Master speaks His inmost message with a persuasion that is the invincible allurements of truth and love.

The emotional nature of man in its close relation to the will, overpowering the latter too often with the force of its propulsions, stands as much in need of rational development as the intellect for whose clarification and admission into the established inheritances of truth we have built so many honored institutions. Religion has put forth all its efforts so that the will of the race shall be bought into the avenues which lead to fruitions beyond the temporal experiences. For the emotions no discipline can be devised more effective than submission to the enthrallments of music. The emotions have their dialectic as has the intelligence ; and the symphony, the sonata, the idyl, call for the same devotion and interpretation as the drama or the romance or the lyric rapture of the poet. It will be a happy consummation when this is fully recognized, and when man shall feel that he

needs to know Beethoven and Bach and Brahms as he needs to know Dante and Shakespeare. It will be good for him to trust himself for adventurous voyagings on

“The tide of music’s golden sea  
Setting towards Eternity.”

In a book recently published, the Rev. R. Heber Newton speaks as follows: “Music is not an imitation of nature. Nature provides no ready-made models of melody or harmony, as she provides perfect types of form and color. Hints she gives of music, but only hints. Man evolves music from his own nature. It is distinctively the human art. It comes forth in the awakening self-consciousness of man. Music expresses the awakening self-consciousness of man as he confronts the mystery of the universe, only to find a deeper mystery within himself. The marvelous creations of modern music are studies in self-consciousness; attempts to run the gamut of man’s moods, to fathom the problems of his being, to find a voice for

“An infant crying in the night,  
An infant crying for the light.”

Music is then man’s interpretation of the mystery of the nature found without him by the secrets of the nature found within him. It is the universe read in the terms of self-consciousness.” Moreover, we have all heard the music of the spheres in the following passage, which brings our tribute to an appropriate close:—

“There’s not the smallest orb which thou beholdest  
But in his motion like an angel sings,  
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubims;  
Such harmony is in immortal souls.”

LOUIS JAMES BLOCK.

Chicago, Illinois.